



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 15

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January 7, 2021

Chancellor Richard A. Carranza
New York City Department of Education
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Chancellor Carranza,

Two of our district schools, PS 124 and PS 516, are experiencing tremendous strain because of severe staffing and funding issues. Our Superintendent Anita Skop and Executive Superintendent Karen Watts have worked and continue to work to remedy the issues, but seem to hit roadblocks at the DOE that include: unmet promises, withholding of register growth money and withholding of exemptions from the hiring freeze. We write to you today in an attempt to lift those barriers. As this is a fluid situation, we hope some of these issues have been resolved since they were originally reported to us and we look forward to a detailed update.

PS 124

PS 124 is a small school in Park Slope that has roughly 260 students. It's overall capacity is 311. The school's roster is growing due to the opening of two homeless shelters nearby. To be certain the growth is a good thing, but because people are slowly filling the shelters, the growth is happening on a rolling basis, not at a fixed point before reporting deadlines, creating budgetary issues. And the school will now be serving a high needs population. They anticipate 40% students in temporary housing when the shelters are full. To meet the needs of these students, there were various promises the DOE made to the school in relation to anticipated growth from the two neighboring

shelters. Our Superintendent and Executive Superintendent have been fighting to ensure the DOE makes good on its promises. Those are detailed here with a status update.

- **Full-time guidance counselor** - PS 124 received a temporary guidance counselor (ATR) for only a month and half. The guidance counselor can only work remotely, which is of limited use to students in temporary housing who often don't have internet access or may be waiting on devices. Also, a temporary ATR guidance counselor does not address the need for counseling services through the full school year.
- **Full-time academic intervention specialist** - PS 124 did receive funding to hire a Special Education teacher for the Gr. 3-5 Self-Contained Special Education Class as of November 30, 2020. Due to roster growth, a second Special Education teacher is needed and will be hired as soon as the DOE releases the school's register growth money. Unfortunately this won't come until Jan. 2021. Moreover, this is not the intended use of register growth funds. Since the school is being forced to use register growth funds for mandated Special Education needs, the school will be left with dire funding needs even if the DOE provides the register growth money owed in January. There is currently no plan to address the funding needs of PS 124 as students from the homeless shelters continue to register.
- **Two school aides** - Progress was made on this front as the school received temporary shortfall money for support staff a few weeks ago. Principal Interlandi worked with her budget officer to increase all four school aides' hours instead of hiring another two school aides.

PS 516

Located in Sunset Park, PS 516 has approximately 445 students, and approximately 63% percent of the 350 families and caregivers speak a language other than English at home. The school is lacking the following key staff:

- **Parent coordinator** - Since the departure of their parent coordinator in early March 2020, school administration and teaching staff have attempted to meet the massive needs of the school community in keeping strong communication and

access to families. This has been extra challenging, as you may imagine, through the onset and duration of the pandemic, particularly as schools resumed and paused, or as time-sensitive or pertinent information needed to be relayed. As a diverse and working class community, approximately 30% of Sunset Park residents do not have internet access in their homes and require individual outreach by phone. The parent coordinator, therefore, serves a crucial role in ensuring families are communicated and engaged with in manners that address accessibility and language barriers.

- **Secretary** - Additionally, PS 516 has been without their sole secretary since June 2020, when their long-standing secretary retired, exacerbating the problems in communicating with PS 516 families.

Despite the continued and tireless advocacy from the Superintendent and Executive Superintendent, calls for an exemption to the DOE hiring freeze allowing PS 516 to proceed in filling these roles has gone unheeded. PS 516's administrative staff have followed procedural requests to review and contact candidates from the ATR pool (including the more comprehensive 2nd ATR log submission this past week) with no success.

We realize that the pandemic has put tremendous strain on all resources across the city, but PS 516 and 124 are facing excessive and unnecessary hurdles to access basics. We struggle to understand why the DOE is either delaying or denying essential educational necessities. These school communities are speaking out and they can wait no longer. We have confidence that you will receive these matters with deep consideration and provide an appropriate resolution.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

CEC15